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ABSTRACT

The computerized Identification-Placement-Tracking-System (IPTS) was developed at the University of California, Los Angeles, Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) as a remedy to problems in interschool coordination. As the IPTS currently functions, the EOC students select up to three colleges of interest for future matriculation. The schools are then sent a Placement School Report identifying students who intend to enroll during a specified year. The colleges then verify enrollment and report on the current status of the student. Direct institutional tracking is less costly and more accurate and auditable than traditional follow-up methods and has a number of potential benefits and applications. These include: (1) making recruitment less expensive and less duplicative; (2) informing pre-college students of whether they are meeting college prerequisites; (3) providing an inexpensive national database for supporting intersegmental and interprogrammatic efforts; (4) serving as an option to national testing services; (5) being sensitive to the needs of disadvantaged and minority students; (6) and furnishing data for research studies. Although IPTS has already established its direction, improvements such as increasing computer resources, extending cost-sharing relationships with schools, initiating marketing programs for new IPTS participants, and establishing cooperative linkages would help the system reach its full potential. (DAB)

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A MINORITY STUDENT DATA BANK AND MORE: THE ULTIMATE COLLEGE IDENTIFICATION AND TRACKING SYSTEM

December 1982

A Discussion Paper by Ramon Cruz

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A Minority Student Data Bank and More:
The Ultimate College Identification and Tracking System

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Imagine the application of the latest data processing technology towards designing a system that has the capacity to identify and track hundreds of thousands of students starting in grade 7 and continuing on through high school, trade school, community college, 4-year college, grad school and finally through two years of employment at the completion of all educational objectives. Imagine also that this system continues to feed back information on the changes, successes and failures of each student to each school that enrolled the student at any point in his/her educational career. As long as we're dreaming, add a high level of accuracy and efficiency to the design of the system, supported by the cooperative information-sharing of each institution connected with the system.

Staying within the twilight zone, let's make our system capable of providing specialized reports for intervention programs, like the federally-funded Educational Opportunity Centers, Talent Search and Upward Bound, or like the state-funded California Student Opportunity & Access Program, devoted to strengthening cooperative linkages between secondary and postsecondary schools. In some cases, these intervention programs may provide the initial identification of students to begin the college-tracking process. This is advantageous because these programs are designed to make themselves more accessible to minorities and low income youths and adults. Many college recruitment and affirmative action programs may benefit by the identification of students by ethnicity,sex and other academically-related characteristics.

In California (a state with 57 independent accredited colleges, 9 University of California campuses, 19 Cal State Universities, 107community colleges and over 1,000 school districts) the challenge of cocrdination between schools, colleges and segments becomes problematic. The problem is exacerbated by the eagerness of colleges to recruit across the state, outpacing diminished travel and administrative budgets. Many high school counselors and teachers believe that recruiters from within and without the state demand too much time from their students, frequently distracting them from their studies. Without limiting access, the schools are looking for alternatives to the traditional road show-classroom presentation. The colleges would also like to increase their recruitment productivity without increasing costs. When intervention programs, sponsored by "soft" state and federal funds, add another layer of recruitment, the call for coordination and avoiding duplication becomes critical. Within this milieu, our futuristic model, called the Identification-Placement-Tracking-System, or I-P-T-S, was conceived.

A basic feature of the system, established in its early structure in 1978, is the student's selection of (up to) three colleges of interest for future matriculation. Although the fully automated "I-P-T-S" is a new development of the program, the essential identification and personal guidance services began in 1974, when congress created the Educational Opportunity Centers program. In the same year, funding for the project was granted to UCLA at the downtown Extension center, located in the heart of urban Los Angeles. Since that time, over 30,000 students have been served by the Educational Opportunity Center. Currently, over 22,000 students are being tracked at 505 colleges and universities across the country. The computerized

tracking system involves sending each college a Placement School Report, identifying the students who intend to enroll in the college at a specified placement year. The college in turn, is expected to verify the enrollment, and report the current status of the students according to official records. This is done by appropriately marking the computer report, signing it, and returning it to the Educational Opportunity Center.

By relying upon the colleges to provide the enrollment status information in this way, the costs of tracking are very low. This feature makes it possible for I-P-T-S to continue tracking students indefinitely, as long as the student is enrolled in an institution that wishes to cooperate with I-P-T-S.

Direct institutional tracking is also more accurate and auditable than the traditional follow-up letter or card which is mailed to the student's home address. The credibility of a student response is difficult to measure, and even more critical is the fact that 40% to 90% of the students never respond to the questionnaire at all. When possible, phone calls are made to those who don't respond, and the questions are read over the phone. Not only is this process expensive in phone and personnel costs, but the credibility of both the student and the caller is open to query. The only documents are the notes written by the caller, and possibly a phone bill, verifying that a call was made to a certain phone number on a certain date.

At a time when both federal and local governments are auditing educational programs more frequently and more vigorously, a tight, documented, and auditable tracking

system, used as the anchor of an internal evaluation process, may spell the difference between survival or surrender in the 80's. Even if only 50% of the 505 placement schools respond affirmatively to the I-P-T-S tracking instrument, the system will be far superior to any other model currently in use. It should be emphasized, however, that it is not only I-P-T-S that can enhance its survival quotient by this system. Every feeder program and school that's connected with the I-P-T-S pipeline will also benefit by automatically receiving updated Enrollment Tracking Reports for its current and former students.

What else can a system like this do? Recently the public universities and colleges in California added additional requirements for admission in English, Math and other subjects. Many students, especially minorities, are uninformed about these requirements and what they mean to their future career opportunities. By expanding the data base for I-P-T-S this year, the system will soon be able to identify whether students are "on track", "off track" or "deficient", meaning that they have fallen behind by one or two subjects in the schedule normally required to qualify for admission by graduation day. Hopefully by next year, the system may be able to generate letters directly to students and parents telling them, in understandable English, Spanish or (?), that they should consider taking specified college prep courses in order to keep the higher education door open. Although this information will at first originate from the student by reporting his/her own progress in specified courses, in time some futuristic schools may agree to provide I-P-T-S direct access to cumulative records. The Placement School Reports, sent to each college, will also include the tracking status of each student. This is intended to encourage the colleges to extend their early outreach and develop-

mental services to both mainstream and marginal students.

Hopefully, many of the diamonds-in-the-rough students will respond to direct contact from postsecondary institutions. Perhaps they will begin to see their academic futures in a more realistic perspective. If this early contact can minimally help to reduce the extremely high incidence of 16-year-old dropouts in many minority communities, the value of this program will be significant. The information and motivation provided directly by contact with postsecondary institutions may make the difference. Minorities and women may also be encouraged to better prepare for the high technology occupations of the future.

Why not hook up this system with other pre-packaged computerized guidance systems, such as the Guidance Information System (GIS) or the California-based Eureka program? I-P-T-S is already beginning to collect the kinds of data from its participants that generally feed into such programs. For example, by completing an optional battery of questions on the I-P-T-S registration form, an occupational choice process, based on the student's expressed goals and interests, may be initiated. Another set of questions is designed to generate a list of private scholarships for which students may be eligible. The GIS files contain 496 scholarship programs which are printed out according to eligibility criteria. By subscribing to these pre-packaged computerized guidance systems, I-P-T-S can absorb the costs of providing these services to its participants.

It is anticipated, however, that the demand for some of these more sophisticated services may quickly outstrip the resources available to the Educational Opportunity Center. When this happens, I-P-T-S may either reduce its services, seek additional

funding, or charge paticipants and institutions fees, based on the cost of each service. To extend the basic tracking services to groups and areas beyond those targeted in the Educational Opportunity Center funding proposal, several supporting programs have agreed to pay $1.00 per student per year, the minimal costs of computer registration, tracking and reporting. However, persons eligible for services within the target area of Los Angeles, based on criteria established by federal regulations, are being provided all of these services free of charge. If schools, colleges and employers within and without the target area were to pay for at least a part of the costs for these services, it may be possible to develop a funding base independent of any single public grant.

In order to support the intersegmental efforts of a group of schools and colleges in the Los Angeles area, I-P-T-S was designed to provide special reports to co-ordinating committees, in addition to reports for each school and college involved. This allows the coordinating committees to monitor the flow of referrals and applications among several member institutions, with the purpose of enhancing choice and access for disadvantaged students. Thousands of high school students each year are identified by "combined presentations" in high schools and community colleges. In this innovative program, representatives of several college segments inform students about the unique qualities of each institution. I-P-T-S can give rosters of students who attend the combined presentations to each institution involved in this consortium effort.

Since a number of local and federal funds are combined in many intersegmental activities, I-P-T-S is sensitive to the different reporting needs for different programs. Students can be identified and selected for evaluative reports by several funding sources, program types, coordinating areas and institutional segments, as well as by many

personal characteristics such as ethnicity, age, sex, income and so on. Students enrolled in community colleges or other postsecondary institutions are asked to identify if they intend to transfer to another institution when they complete their immediate objective. The identification of transfer students is of paramount importance to cooperative efforts between 2-year and 4-year colleges. This system can not only convenience the Los Angeles area coordinating groups, but is capable of providing similar support for consortia or institutional clusters in any area of the state, or even outside the state.

The intent of this design is to provide an inexpensive data base for supporting intersegmental and interprogramatic efforts anywhere in the country, with a minimum of duplication and a maximum of service. If the cost is low for a data base of 30,000 students, the per-student cost will be even lower as the data base expands to 50,000 students, 100,000 students, or even more. By supporting intersegmental efforts in this way, it is hoped that more institutions in other areas of the state and country will be willing to consider establishing cooperative linkages to coordinate local outreach activities.

When we begin to talk about a national program with 6-digit figures, it is natural to begin to compare this data base with the national testing services that also provide lists of students to colleges. The I-P-T-S market, however, is different than the traditional testing service markets, although there will be, and should be, some overlap. First of all, I-P-T-S does not require taking a test to participate. All that is needed is to fill out a 4-page registration form which identifies the types of schools and programs that may be of interest in the future. In California, for example, the vast majority of disadvantaged students never take the SAT, since

85% of them enroll in community colleges where the SAT is not required. Many of these students, however, do aspire to transfer to a four-year institution once they complete the 2-year curriculum. Even at the point of transfer, the college test is not required, and therefore this vast population, of over 100,000 minorities in California alone, is not identified or targeted through the traditional testing service. The overall number of students enrolled in California Community Colleges is over one million. Community college transfer-oriented students are a prime market for I-P-T-S.

Because no test is involved, I-P-T-S is inherently cheaper than the testing services, and therefore can be offered to students at much lower fees, regardless of institutional or grant support. If a sliding fee strucuture were developed, based on family income, it is probable that low-income students would pay only one or two dollars per year, as opposed to test fees ranging from $10 to $20 per test. Although a number of test fee waivers are available to low-income students, the I-P-T-S registration process will probably be perceived as cheaper and more accessible by both low-income and middle-income students alike.

I-P-T-S is also designed to target a wider age range of students, starting from 7th grade students and extending to college-age populations and older adults. Once a student is registered with I-P-T-S, s/he may continue to be tracked and guided by affiliated programs until completing his/her ultimate educational objective, whether it be a 2-year degree or a Ph.D. The earlier the tracking begins, however, the better, since every effort will be made to link younger students with early outreach services that can improve the students' chances of entering and successfully completing

a postsecondary program.

A special feature of I-P-T-S is its sensitivity to the needs and interests of disadvantaged students, as well as the strengths and limitations of programs designed to serve these students. Ultimately, I-P-T-S will probably serve more middle-income students than low-income students because of its value to all college-oriented groups. Since it was originally designed with the purpose of serving disadvantaged students, however, its basic structure will continue to provide better access and more support for disadvantaged persons. This will be so, regardless of the number of mainstream participants who access the system in the years ahead.

By maintaining a balance of mainstream and marginal students, be they from one social class or another, it is more likely that the opportunity for access will be relegated to the college enrollment market place, rather than held in the hands of gatekeepers, such as tradition-bound counselors, or exclusive tracking programs. I-P-T-S will facilitate contact in both directions, automatically and efficiently, between postsecondary institutions and a diverse range of student populations. This will make it easier and less costly for colleges to access a wider market of students than otherwise possible.

The question of financing the community colleges has focused much attention on the need to improve the transfer function from junior to senior colleges. The fact that Hispanics and blacks enroll in community colleges at higher percentages than their white counterparts, contributes to lower bachelor degree completion rates for minorities than for whites. A recent study by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) indicates that the transfer rate for Hispanics is as low as 1%. Other reports by the California Postsecondary Education Commission reveal the

overall transfer rate for all groups in the California Community Colleges to be 3%. Very few intervention and recruitment programs have intensively targeted community college students because, in contrast to the high school or junior high school setting, there are no convenient vehicles available to contact the majority of would be transfer students once enrolled.

The transfer rate may hopefully improve when senior colleges are able to directly communicate with 2-year college students to inform them about articulation requirements and application filing procedures. A recent report by the College Board revealed that Hispanics comprised only 2.5% of the students who took the SAT in 1982. This figure is disproportionately small when compared with blacks, who comprised 9.0% and whites who made up 81.9% of the test-taking population. The lower test scores for blacks and Hispanics, and the lower participation rates for Hispanics, result in marked underrepresentation of Hispanics and blacks in college recruitment lists distributed by the testing services. The national figures for Hispanics are greatly impacted by the California phenomenon, since the 100,000+ Hispanics enrolled in the California Community Colleges represent about 25% of all college-enrolled Hispanics in the U.S. mainland, in both undergraduate and graduate levels. A four-year retention study initiated by Alexander Astin in 1972 showed that 34% of the whites, 24% of the blacks, 16% of the American Indians and 13% of the Hispanics had completed the baccalaureate degree by 1976.

Programs focusing on high-tech disciplines, such as science, math and engineering may be provided lists of students interested in those areas early in the developmental process. In 1979 only 14 blacks and 20 Hispanics received bachelor degrees in engineering from the University of California out of a total of 1,603. This percentage, of less than one percent for each group, was even lower for blacks in the Cal

State University (0.5%), but higher for Hispanics (3.4%) who received the engineering degree. Unfortunately, only 4 of the 72 Hispanic engineering graduates were female, as were only 1 of the 11 black graduates of the Cal State University. Only 4 of the 14 blacks and 2 of the 20 Hispanics who graduated in engineering from the University of California were female. Both blacks and Hispanics (especially women) are severely underrepresented in the biological sciences, business and other technical areas across the board. By helping employers and specialized college recruitment programs make contact with students as early as possible, minority students and women may be guided towards building the proper academic foundation to provide for success in high tech disciplines in later years.

As college enrollment continues to decline during the '80's and early '90's, it is anticipated that new definitions for quality and talent will be promulgated. Rather than limiting access to only those who are sure to succeed, many institutions will begin to fortify those services that can support a student's success, in spite of initial limitations. Rather than colleges exclusively selecting students, as has been the case in the 60's and 70's, students will find the colleges in the 80's much more flexible and open to those who have the will and the means to enroll. In addition, improved research and data developed in the 70's and early 80's, will shed light on effective methods of teaching students from diverse backgrounds, and will suggest new ways of helping students to cope with the challenges of academic rigor. Once the colleges decide that they really do want to open their doors to new markets, they will find that the ground has already been laid for successfully pursuing these directions by the demonstration projects, reasearch and avante garde programs of the 70's. As long as the colleges are not locked into exclusive methods of identifying students, such as through the college entrance tests, and as long as there are low-

cost alternatives available to access these markets, the predicted changes should be spontaneous.

The efficient enrollment tracking capability of I-P-T-S will also lend itself quite naturally to new demonstration projects and research endeavors that base their outcomes on the success of students in entering or advancing through various postsecondary institutions. On a contractual basis, for example, a group of students who were provided a specific treatment in a given school, may be tracked by I-P-T-S and matched with an appropriate group already included in the I-P-T-S data base. Baccalaureate degree granting institutions may ask I-P-T-S to track a group of graduates through whatever graduate studies they might undertake. At the same time, I-P-T-S may determine whether college grads acquired full time employment, and whether such employment was related to their academic majors.

As more minority students successfully complete their undergraduate studies, new initiatives may develop to expand the opportunities for minorities to undertake advanced studies. The recently noted drop in graduate school enrollment would suggest that graduate schools will also be exploring the possibility of seeking new markets. I-P-T-S may provide access to student populations interested in graduate studies one to two years prior to graduation and also prior to taking the graduate school examination.

Although I-P-T-S has already established its direction, a lot remains to be done before its full potential can be realized. To speed up its development, more resources are needed in the areas of computer programming and technical assistance. Cost-sharing relationships with a variety of schools and colleges need to be extended. A full fledged marketing program for new I-P-T-S participants should be

initiated. Linkages with corporate employers, who are interested in accessing lists of talented minority and majority students, need to be established. Ultimately, the major institutional supporters of I-P-T-S will constitute the advisory board for shaping the direction and priorities for future development. The need for such a program is evident. Whether it becomes a reality depends to a large extent on whether the academic and corporate community is willing to follow an alternate path.

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